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Teaching citizenship in the faith school: qualitative evidence from separate schools in Northern Ireland

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The purpose of this paper is to examine how teachers teach and students learn about citizenship education in two faith based schools in Northern Ireland. The data show that participants in the Catholic school were confident in their own identity; Teachers encouraged active engagement with contentious, conflict related debates and students displayed empathy with other racial and religious groups. In the Protestant school, teachers avoided any reference to identity and conflict and students seemed to have limited knowledge of these issues. The findings emphasize the extent to which separate schools embody the cultural norms prevalent within each of the communities that they serve and reveal the influence which these norms have for teaching and learning about citizenship.

Keywords: separate school; citizenship education; identity; Northern Ireland; intergroup contact

Introduction

The Government of Ireland Act 1920 provided for a border between the North of Ireland, which was to remain part of the United Kingdom, and the South of Ireland which was to become independent. Whilst the new state of NI was deeply resisted by the minority Catholic population who perceived that their Catholic/Irish identity would be threatened it was

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embraced by a majority Protestant-Unionist population who celebrated the continued union with Britain on the basis that it would protect their political and religious interests. The Unionist government which assumed power in the early 1920s was in place until the early 1970s when accusations of inequality and discrimination on the part of the Catholic community resulted in a violent conflict and eventually led to direct rule by the British Government (Buckland, 1981). A peace process which began in the 1990s culminated in the 1998 “Good Friday” Agreement which created a new devolved power-sharing assembly that has been in place [albeit with several hiatuses] since 1999.

The partition of Ireland reinforced the societal and political divisions between the Catholic and Protestant communities which had hitherto structured the [Northern] Irish landscape. Thus engagement in separate cultural, sporting and religious practices maintained a sense of difference between the communities that ensured that there was only minimal intergroup contact (Harris, 1986). However it is perhaps in education where the social divisions were and remain most stark. Despite the development of a network of integrated schools in the 1980s, most Catholics and Protestants continue to attend a school with their co-religionists and this has raised questions about the potential of schools to contribute to societal division. However it wasn’t until after the onset of the conflict that the relationship between schools and societal fragmentation was afforded explicit attention by educational policy makers (Dunn 1990). The first formal public statement by the Department of Education in terms of community relations was set out in 1982 in the DE Circular ‘The Improvement of Community Relations: The Contribution of Schools’, and this was followed by The Schools Community Relations Programme (formerly the Cross-Community Contact Scheme) which was introduced in 1987. This voluntary programme aimed to bring together children from both sides of the political divide in structured, on-going community relations programmes. The 1989 Education Reform (NI) Order however marked a significant change as it *mandated* schools to engage with community relations issues. Hence two new cross curricular themes ‘Education for Mutual

Understanding' (EMU) and 'Cultural Heritage' were to become compulsory elements of the curriculum with the aim of encouraging children to 'learn to live with differences in a spirit of acceptance, fairness and mutual respect' (Richardson 1997, para. 8). In 2007 a statutory programme of 'Local and Global Citizenship' education was introduced. Reflecting the premise of citizenship education in other jurisdictions, key themes of diversity and inclusion; equality and social justice; democracy and active participation and human rights and social responsibility were to be explored through the curricula. A key intention was to encourage 'new ways of thinking' around how to participate in a diverse and conflicted society (Arlow 2012). Citizenship education was to be delivered through a whole school agenda but was specifically taught through the core areas of learning entitled 'Personal Development & Mutual Understanding' at primary level and 'Learning for Life and Work' at post-primary level. Importantly, the emphasis was on teachers adopting an inquiry based approach to citizenship encouraging students to deliberate around issues of power, equality and human rights within the local and global context (CCEA, 2007; Geboers et al, 2013; Van Driel et al 2016). Despite its intentions though concerns have been raised in relation to the willingness of teachers to adopt active pedagogies with respect to teaching about the conflict and such reticence appears to be compounded by a lack of training (McEvoy 2007; Niens, et al 2013). So whilst citizenship education is a component of initial teacher-training programmes Local and Global Citizenship is not specified as a Main Subject (Arlow, 2012). Moreover, although an extensive opt-in statutory programme of in-service training was introduced for citizenship teachers from 2002-2007 not all teachers availed of it and some were reluctant to embrace the active teaching methodologies it championed. No statutory training has been available since 2007 (O'Connor et al 2009; Arlow, 2012).

These concerns about teaching citizenship have been documented but less understood is the importance of school type in determining how citizenship education is taught and learned.

Whilst Veugelers (2011, 222) argues that ‘differences between schools and between school types greatly influence the possibilities for citizenship education’ there remains a lack of empirical analysis in this regard. Yet it is of obvious importance in NI as schools are deemed to reflect and reproduce quite distinct socio-political narratives with respect to the political context (Murray,1985). The purpose of this paper is to explore how citizenship education is taught and learned in separate schools. It begins by defining citizenship education and exploring the relationship between separate schools and citizenship education before presenting the methods and data

Citizenship education

The concept of citizenship has traditionally been defined as a relationship between the individual and the state (Heater,2001). As the world has become more economically interdependent and as boundaries between states have become more porous, a more complex understanding of citizenship has evolved; one that relates to the ‘social and the cultural and which extends to the interpersonal capturing how people live together’ (Veugelers,2011,209). The broadening of the concept has also coincided with the idea that schools and curricula have an explicit role to play in offering students opportunities to experience and learn about issues allied to political participation, identity and intergroup relations (Van Driel et al 2016). Veugelers (2011) refers to schools as ‘practice’ grounds for the realisation of the ideals of citizenship whilst Geboers, et al (2013) argue that the school is an ideal place in which young people can understand and experience democracy. It is also acknowledged that if students are to understand themselves as citizens who actively participate in political processes whilst practicing the virtues of tolerance and respect then teachers need to embrace a pedagogy that encourages reflection by stimulating the critical

capacities of young people (Gamage 2008; Geboers et al 2013;). Dejaehgere (2009) highlights the limits of didactic pedagogies that rely on 'content led' citizenship education which fail to examine societal structures and relations that create inequity. Instead he argues for a critical form of citizenship which encourages young people to question the existing socio-political order and how it creates injustices and inequalities for groups in society. Hence the citizenship classroom should be inquiry based and infused with activities which promote interaction, reflection, debate and discussion around political issues (Gamage, 2008; Geboers,et al 2013); values which have similarly informed citizenship education in NI (Arlow, 2012). Yet whether the separate school system can create a meaningful space to harness these pedagogical practices remains unclear as is shown below:

Citizenship education and the separate school

The view that separate or denominational schools are more constraining than emancipating and so will produce 'intolerant' pupils is well rehearsed. Judge (2001, 473) for example suggests that there is a fear that 'single-faith schools will institutionalise segregation' and that the education of communities in isolation will breed hostility 'and [this] could be a breeding ground for the rioters, or terrorists, of the future'. Writing about citizenship education in denominational schools in the Netherlands, Veugelers (2011,219) similarly suggests that denominational schools can compromise citizenship education because teaching:

will ... be strongly focused on the own group and will not teach making connections and handling diversity.

This point is echoed by Smith (2003) who cautions against 'mono cultural' separate schools which may limit the successful implementation of citizenship education in NI.

The assumption is that interaction between groups is a critical determinant of effective citizenship education. Yet this view has been challenged by proponents of separate schools who place less emphasis on the potential of intergroup contact to embed values of citizenship. Instead, they posit that the protection which faith schools offer minority groups is as

important for group relations particularly where communities are divided or in conflict. Banks (2001) explains that when diverse values are respected and given voice (acknowledgement which is perhaps facilitated by the existence of the separate school), then the national culture is seen as legitimate by all citizens and cultural, national and global identifications become dynamic and interactive. Separate schools can instil a sense of in-group confidence that allows members to more effectively reach out to others in a tolerant way (Short 2003; Halstead and McLaughlin 2005; Halstead 2009). The schools also potentially provide a safe space for the exploration of the difficult and contested issues with which students of citizenship in any context will have to grapple. Indeed whilst research frequently laments the extent to which teachers in mixed or integrated settings engage in avoidance behaviours around issues which are deemed controversial because several valid perspectives on the same question exist (Donnelly 2004; Niens and Cairns 2005; McEvoy 2007; Gamage 2008; Hanna 2017) it might be argued that the separate school, where members are (broadly) drawn from the same community may offer a secure place for developing the active and dialogical forms of teaching advocated above (Holley and Steiner 2005; Van Driel et al 2016).

Yet there is no single interpretation of a 'separate school' and this point resonates particularly strongly in NI. Here, Catholic schools have always explicitly promoted their religious identity whilst for Protestant schools the emphasis on 'Protestant' religiosity has been vaguer. The reason for the distinction lies in controversial legislation in 1930 which permitted schools which were only attended and staffed by Protestants to avail of 100% public funding; hence the schools were *de jure* 'state' but *de facto* Protestant schools. Catholic schools chose to remain independent of the state system fearing that they would be forced to relinquish the religious character of the schools (Akenson, 1973). The schools are not only defined by religious loyalties, but are also described as epitomising the incompatible and irreconcilable cultural assumptions and constitutional aspirations of the community they serve (Murray, 1985) and since the 1998 Agreement, evidence suggests that these assumptions, especially in relation to

issues of identity and citizenship, have evolved in quite distinct ways (Garry and McNicholl, 2014/15). Tonge, (2015) notes for example that the fundamental achievement of the Agreement lies in the Catholic population accepting that they can be comfortably *Irish* under British rule and in the post-Agreement era Irish identity has become a source of pride. For Protestants, however the Agreement is not regarded as a political gain and there is a belief that the community's British identity is threatened (Mitchell 2003; Southern 2007; Gallagher and Cairns 2011). If schools are 'mini-polities' 'where children can explore what it means to be a member of a community beyond their families, where they learn they are the equal to other citizens [or not] (Flanagan, et al 1998:462) then it seems apposite to ask how citizenship is understood in schools where potentially different political and religious values prevail.

The paper is guided by three central questions: How do Catholic and Protestant teachers and students define their school? How do citizenship teachers in different schools interpret their role with respect to teaching about identity and conflict? How do students of citizenship in separate schools understand identity and the conflict in NI?

Methods

The schools and the data

To lend privilege to the process and meanings attached to citizenship education by small, purposeful samples of participants a qualitative approach was adopted (Sale, et al, 2002). One catholic and one protestant post-primary school were selected to participate. Whilst it would have been useful to include an integrated school the dearth of empirical evidence around the role of separate schools in contributing to societal division determined the focus on separate schools (Parker-Jenkins 2014). The two schools were selected purposively on the basis of their similarities: they were located in large market towns and were non-academically

selective institutions of a similar size. The Protestant school was located in a mainly Protestant town whilst the Catholic school was located in a predominantly Catholic town; there were only very small numbers of the 'other' community enrolled in each institution (less than 3% in each). Prior to data collection all participants had provided the researchers with written informed voluntary consent to take part in audio recorded interviews on the basis that the information collected was treated in confidence and that they would not be identified in any article arising from the research. Ethical approval was granted by the University where the researchers are employed.

Ten focus groups comprising 3-4 friends with pupils aged 11-12 (Year 8) sought to explore how young people described their school and how they understood themselves and others as citizens within the context of NI. There were several reasons for focusing on 11-12 year olds. Firstly, pupils from Year 8 had recently completed the primary-level area of learning, 'Personal Development & Mutual Understanding' and had started the learning area of 'Learning for Life and Work' at post-primary level; they were therefore at an important juncture of their citizenship education. Secondly, theories of social identity development in children (such as socio-cognitive theory (Aboud 1988), developmental intergroup theory (Bigler and Liben 2007), social identity development theory (Nesdale, Maass, Durkan, and Griffiths 2005), and the theory of social mind (Abrams, Rutland, Pelletier, and Ferrell 2009) recognise middle childhood (typically 9 to 11 years old) as a vitally important stage in either prejudice acquisition or diminishment. It was anticipated that an examination of the ways in which this age group referred to their immediate social and school contexts and experiences with individuals and groups who are different from them could illuminate how children engage with issues of conflict and identity within the citizenship curriculum. The focus groups were constituted on the basis that friends may feel empowered and supported in the co-presence of those they know (Lewis 1992). The friendships between the students seemed to create a relaxed environment that prompted students to speak freely. In addition, focus groups by their

very nature make visible the nature of relationships and illustrate how issues can be negotiated and developed during group interviews (Morgan 1996). The interactions between students offered insights into how they reworked their understandings of identity issues in the light of new information from peers (see data below).

Two semi structured interviews were also undertaken with four teachers: the citizenship teacher and the principal in each school; interviews sought to explore how participants understood their school; how they understood citizenship education and the extent to which critical pedagogies were employed. These multiple perspectives enabled a detailed understanding of how complex issues of identity and the conflict in Northern Ireland were explored in different contexts. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and each group interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

Analysis and Researcher Reflexivity

All interviews were recorded, fully transcribed, and analysed using thematic analysis procedures (Braun and Clarke 2006). Hence we independently searched for 'patterned responses' (Braun and Clarke 2006, 11) across the data set in an effort to capture the essence of the teacher and student experience of citizenship education. We then shared the key themes noting the high degree of consensus. In this sense the analysis was 'data driven' although our interpretation was constantly compared to and understood in relation to the literature cited above (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Berger (2015, 220) argues that the analysis process is not value free and 'researchers need to increasingly focus on self-knowledge and sensitivity; better understand the role of the self in the creation of knowledge'. During the data analysis we were constantly aware of our identity as Catholics in NI and the extent to which this influenced the ways in which we interpreted the data. In an effort to enhance data dependability we engaged in a process of what Berger (2015) refers to as 'peer consultation' to strengthen the trustworthiness of the data. Hence a

colleague, in this case from the Protestant community, who was expert in the field of intergroup relations in Northern Ireland, offered feedback on our initial themes. Their views confirmed our analysis but also drew attention to aspects of the data related to identity which we had overlooked. Taking their advice we revised the initial themes and these are reflected in the data which is presented below.

Findings

The initial phase of data collection was concerned with developing a rapport with the participants so as to optimise the level of discussion. Once a relationship had been established, participants were asked about their school and the community in which it was located before moving on to explore conflict and identity in Northern Ireland. The purpose of the questions on school type was to engage participants in a discussion about the importance of religiosity in their school and to lend clarity to the lived and experienced reality of each institution.

It was unsurprising, given their recent transition to post-primary school, that pupils described their current school in relation to their primary school. Thus, size of the school, the range of subjects, bigger classes and the pressures of examinations were all cited as features that set their post-primary school apart from the primary school. When asked more specifically to compare the socio-religio culture of the school to other post-primary schools in the area, the participants, described the schools in quite different ways. Pupils and teachers in the Catholic school referred to its avowedly religious and Irish mission and were clear that this meant that the school displayed religious icons, observed religious rituals and celebrated 'being Irish' through, for example, the teaching of the Irish language:

It is a religious school not like the integrated² school it is different. I went to an integrated primary... this school is Catholic and I think it is Irish; or we are Irish like

we celebrate that on St Patrick's Day we call it Irish Day and we sing Irish songs and that (Catholic Pupil)

Rather than defining it in terms of its positive attributes, all of the participants in the Protestant school described their institution in terms of what it wasn't (i.e. not Catholic). There was also a lack of certainty around the school mission:

Well it isn't a Catholic (school) no... it is a Protestant school because everyone is Protestant and I don't think any Catholics would go here? (Protestant Pupil)

It was noted earlier that Protestant schools have traditionally occupied an ambiguous status in NI and the students' lack of clarity may reflect a more general uncertainty around their status and a reluctance to define these schools in terms of their Protestant identity (Hughes 2011). The comments also however reveal the challenges in determining what 'being Protestant' actually means for the Protestant community in NI.

Teaching and learning about the conflict within the citizenship curriculum

As noted earlier the citizenship curriculum seeks to afford students opportunities to develop new ways of thinking in a diverse and conflicted society. Hence it wasn't surprising that teachers and principals referred to citizenship education as a key vehicle through which the "values of reconciliation were transmitted" (teacher, Protestant school). Yet closer inspection of the data revealed very different interpretations of how to teach these 'values'. In the Catholic school, the principal referred to citizenship education as a key priority and the citizenship teacher explained that for her citizenship was, in part, about fostering in students a deeper understanding of inter-personal and societal conflict:

We look at where does conflict come from and it always seems to come from one group who think that they are superior to the other and trying to put somebody down. We looked at the different ways that people put each other down. We do role play and activities looking at the silent one of exclusion and how painful that was and how crafty and clever it was because they couldn't accuse you of saying something. We also looked at the fact that everyone didn't have to like each other but that it is about not saying unkind words being respectful of points of view.... We looked at whether it was individual or whether it was in the community, the different layers of conflict and resolution.

I: Was that difficult?

Sometimes we have a confidence in our own sense of Catholic Irishness... so that is important. We have values of acceptance, tolerance and respect within the classroom and try to say that conflict is inevitable and we just have to find a way around it. I wouldn't say that the school can do everything or we are perfect –far from it. But we have put our heads together on this ... the only thing is that it is difficult to know if it works –now we can see that children's views change but it is difficult to measure (Citizenship teacher)

The teacher's concern to inspire students to view conflict as not simply 'dislike' of others but related to oppression within society was a potent aspect of her pedagogical approach and one that strongly coalesced with the stated objectives of promoting an understanding of equality and rights as advocated in the citizenship curriculum (CCEA, 2007). She believed it was important to encourage students to understand the systemic nature of conflict and the evidence suggested that pupils had deeply engaged with this type of teaching:

Pupil 9: I have really enjoyed the citizenship stuff because of the way it was taught—like you could have a good talk about everything...I liked the teacher. I think she was

really good getting us to think about things...think about why conflicts happen about politics and sharing power those sorts of things.

Pupil 8: Yeah I did too. I think that you know doing like role play and stuff like that was good because it meant that you had to make yourself think like somebody who wasn't you... like say a Protestant or when we were doing stuff on Germany one time we had to pretend we were Nazi soldiers – I love all that.

Pupil10: Yes I liked that too it was great fun and then it makes you think that all countries have wars at some time and we moan about here but it isn't too much different than other places well it is, but it isn't too... you know what I mean...

The data demonstrate the value of the 'active' dialogical teaching methods in citizenship education already identified as important by Geboers et al (2013). When teachers invite discussion around conflict, identity and group difference, pupils can rework their own subjectivities in powerful ways (Ball, 2000). Whilst she is keen to stress that her approach wasn't "perfect" and that she would require training (importantly neither teacher had participated in any statutory training) it is clear that the citizenship class was a space wherein students could reflect on and challenge their own views whilst learning to empathise with alternative perspectives. Her teaching strategies seemed to have prompted the pupils to frame their experiences within a broader literature, allowing them to develop an informed understanding of conflict and identity.

Yet where the teacher in the Catholic school felt confident to model an active and critical approach to citizenship education, this was not the reported experience of the teacher in the Protestant school. Here the emphasis was on offering opportunities for intergroup contact as a mechanism to challenge conflict and promote positive intergroup relations. When asked how

issues related to the conflict were discussed during citizenship education, the teacher and the principal talked extensively about the participation of the students in a cross-community event in the South of Ireland, which they argued had enhanced intergroup understanding. The citizenship teacher, with the support of the principal, decided *not* to explicitly engage in classroom debate related to the local conflict prior to, during, or after these meetings, arguing that such discussion may negatively affect the students' educational experience:

I: what about dealing with citizenship and the conflict ... issues of difference ... how would that be tackled here?

Yes we are keen that students do get to know about the conflict and group difference that is a certainty; it is part of the citizenship rubric ...but we wouldn't encourage open discussions about these things as you wouldn't know where that could end up. That would not be possible here I think as we would have hard line students and students from very Loyalist backgrounds and there would be different opinions that would make that kind of discussion very sensitive and very difficult I think. Just now in terms of how we would teach around citizenship: well, we would bring the students away and just an example is that we had a great meeting with a Catholic school down South [Ireland] and it worked well. No one fought and the students got on really well (Principal)

I: Did you explore difference, conflict and identity before or during the time away with the Catholic children?

No, that wouldn't have been the objective. Personally I don't see the point of discussing that kind of thing and I think that we can give a bit of information of the history in Northern Ireland to get around that in the citizenship curriculum but from

my point of view I think we were lucky everyone was together and got on and a few of the kids said to me they really enjoyed it which was great. I think that kind of exploration or in-depth discussion is harder here because we have all different kinds of students, not many Catholics, but different students with different perspectives on things ... (Citizenship teacher)

Unlike their Catholic counterparts, the teacher did not appear to lend priority to the discussion of issues related to the conflict; rather, they seemed fearful that such discussions would expose difference and upset the harmonious relations that currently prevailed. Yet, and as noted above (Gamage, 2008; DeJaeghere, 2009; Geboers et al 2013), this lack of critique can make it difficult to encourage students to develop the nuanced understandings that will prove pivotal in effecting change. Indeed, these concerns were neatly captured in the evidence from pupils; whilst the citizenship teacher deemed contact to be effective in challenging “hardened attitudes”, the students who participated in the contact initiative were much less convinced. Their comments reflect the challenges of bringing groups together without also offering an opportunity to develop their understanding of the issues that divide them:-

I: You mentioned earlier that you went on a trip to Dundalk to meet Catholic pupils from another school. What did you think about that?

Pupil 1: Well I thought it was a really good laugh – the best bit was getting out of school- I loved that

I: Did you enjoy meeting the Catholic students?

Pupil 2: Yes because it was good craic but you know we didn’t really talk that much to each other everybody kind of kept in their own group during the day and then at the dinner people talked to each other but not about what it was like being a Catholic or Protestant – maybe that would have been weird

I: Did everyone have that experience?

Pupil 1: Well we didn't like... you didn't keep in contact and I don't think anyone did... maybe that is a bit of a ...I don't know it was annoying because you didn't change what you thought or anything about Catholics it was a bit...like some of the ones in our class were laughing at the Catholic accents and stuff and saying things about them ... I don't know it was just funny like I was looking to find out you know about Catholics ...but I was afraid of saying that out loud or I didn't really know how to do that. But it was still a good laugh and stuff but I don't really know what you would do 'cause you wouldn't want to cause trouble or bad feeling ...

I: How might it have been improved?

Pupil 2: I don't think that I would know anything about Catholics now 'cause we just did it once and then we never saw them one's again; I think maybe the teachers could have made us learn more about them...or something I don't know but my friend did that before at her school and she thought it was good and it sounded like it might be good ...

Pupil 3: Yeah I thought that too ... well just knowing more about what they think and stuff beforehand.

Pettigrew et al. (2011, 278) have championed the value of long-term sustained contact in 'desegregated schools' on the basis that it will promote better relations between divided groups. However, the type of contact advocated is different than that which was experienced by the pupils in the Protestant school. Rather than instilling an acceptance of the 'other', the short term and piecemeal nature of the contact seemed to create a sense of unease that is unlikely to be beneficial for challenging intergroup tensions (Hewstone et al. 2014). What is also significant here though is that two of the participants seemed keen to access knowledge

about group differences and conflict *alongside* contact on the basis that it would have helped them better understand the perspectives of the Catholic community. Their comments are important because they hint at a dissonance between teachers and pupils in terms of teaching citizenship and suggest that teachers' reticence around teaching conflict related issues may have compromised learning amongst students who were more prepared to discuss the conflict than the teachers assumed them to be.

Self-definitions and perceptions of others

Exploring identity and developing relations with the 'other' is an important component of the citizenship curriculum. Students were asked therefore to comment on own and other identity groups in Northern Ireland. Students in the Protestant school always described themselves as "Protestant" and/or Northern Irish or British. However, despite their initial certainty, and as interviews continued it became apparent that the term 'Protestant' was not imbued with a universally agreed definition. Moreover, where the students did attempt to define what 'being Protestant' meant, they framed their response in terms of what they were *not*. The following extracts well illustrate the sense of uncertainty:

I: How would you describe yourself?

Pupil1: I am a girl and I live in XXXX

I: Would you describe yourself any other way? In terms of your religion or the country where you live?

Pupil 1: Oh right I am a Protestant

I: What might that mean?

Pupil 1: Emm don't know, like we ...

Pupil2: (Interjects) I know it is to do with the (union) flag and stuff and we wouldn't celebrate like Ireland and things like the Roman Catholics

Pupil1: Oh yeah that is right we wouldn't do that They wouldn't march on the 12 July or go to the bonfires and stuff on 11 July yeah we would though.

'Being Protestant', as Todd et al. (2009, 98) argue, is 'complex..., and not defined by any one element, belief, practice or collective narrative', hence it is perhaps to be expected that children might find it difficult to offer a coherent definition of their 'Protestant' culture, or identity. What is perhaps more important (drawing on the data above from teachers) though is that the teachers, deeply cognisant of variances in belief, practice and narrative did not see the school as a safe space for students to dissect their sense of identity and so they studiously avoided any reference to it. As the data below neatly demonstrate however, the consequence of avoidance is that a knowledge vacuum emerges which children seek to fill by co-constructing inaccurate accounts that reproduce rather than challenge prevailing stereotypes.

I: Does anyone know what being 'Catholic' means? What does a Catholic believe?

Pupil 1: Don't know (laughs) just different from us like

I: Do you know what being a Catholic means in practice?

Pupil 2: My mother's friend is a Catholic but I think they are a bit different I don't know the way they dress...they look different...they have a veil...but I would still be friends with them

I: Do you ever get the chance to meet any Catholics?

Pupil 1: No...well sometimes

I: Do you like to meet Catholics?

Pupil 2: Probably depends on their personality.

I: what is different about Catholics?

Pupil 1: Sometimes, how they look

I: what do they look like?

Pupil 1: Nearly every Catholic I have seen has had a squint in their eye. They would knock you down you know and I think that is because they can't see right

Pupil 2: They dress differently – they wear Celtic tops.....They think differently. Some wear funny clothes like veils oh I already said that.

Pupil 1: I do not think Catholics believe in God as much as Protestants do.....they worship someone else.

Pupil 2: I know some Catholics they are all right but they are not my friends and they might beat you up - I heard that.

One view might be that these sentiments are largely meaningless, if faintly amusing, and are attributable to the immaturity of the respondents. Another view however might be that they reveal a predilection towards a deficit model of thinking around the 'other' that seems to have resonances with the concept of 'pseudo-speciation' (Erikson 1966; Erikson 1985). This concept denotes the instinctive tendency by groups who are under threat or experiencing change to ascribe 'super significance' to their own identity groups whilst denying the 'genetic integrity of the human species' (Erikson 1985, 1). In addition it also reflects the challenge for separate schools when seeking to encourage young people to see other citizens as equal to themselves. Whilst the pupils did not overtly refer to Catholics as belonging to a different species, their use of language betrayed a belief that Catholics were not only different but exhibited certain biological and sartorial defects that rendered them somehow inferior. Interestingly, their

reported contact with Catholics seems to have only intensified their negative perceptions. Literature suggests that for such negativity to have transpired the contact that the students experienced was probably marred by high anxiety and feelings of threat (Hewstone, 2003).

Importantly, the responses of the Catholic students to the same questions were discernibly different, suggesting that negative reactions to 'otherness' is neither innate nor inevitable amongst those educated in separate schools. The citizenship teacher in the Catholic school had explained that a key part of her task was to educate children about others; however most students reported that they "didn't know much about the outlook of Protestants" or their culture (data from one focus group). Nonetheless, when asked about themselves and others, students did reveal knowledge of self-identity and the Protestant identity was described in largely positive terms. Although three students were quick to express their irritation with the "Protestant marches³", there was a general sense during interviews that Protestants and their traditions ought to be accepted. Indeed, even for those Catholics who reported that they did not have any Protestant friends, there was a desire for greater generosity both at a political and social level. The extracts below reveal something of the pupils' capacity to articulate an informed view on political and cultural issues but also, and importantly, to negotiate and modify their views in the light of new information:

I: What do you think of the Protestant community?

Pupil 5: Yes I think Protestants are fine; we have Protestant neighbours and we would see them a lot. We are friendly with them; they would go to the Church of Ireland I think and I suppose they would have their own ideas and things that would not maybe link to us and our ideas. They wouldn't support a united Ireland maybe or they would play cricket where as we play Gaelic (games)

Pupil 4: I go to a youth club everyone was invited we didn't even know who was Protestant or Catholic so it just turned out they were the same as us really; I really like that kind of thing like I think there should definitely be more of it

I: What about traditions like the Orange Marches?

Pupil 5: Is that when the Protestants march?

I: Yes.

Pupil 4: I hate that, there is so much traffic

Pupil 5: I don't know many Protestants but I would say that we have our day when we march so they should have their day when they march.

Pupil 6: yes I know; I think everyone, like Catholics as well, should be able to march if they want but there are people who don't really like it and they should have their views taken into account too

Pupil 5: I think that too but I think everyone needs to calm down about it and if people are marching then they need to respect the rights of everyone

Pupil: 4: Yes that is what I was going to say....

Halstead and McLaughlin (2005, 70) have argued that 'toleration pre-supposes being confident in one's own beliefs and values and having a clear self-identity'. It might be argued that the recent political developments, which have enhanced esteem amongst the Catholic community within NI (Tonge 2015), combined with their capacity to openly assert their Catholic and Irish identity within the school, offered a strong basis for teachers in the Catholic school to actively engage students in an exploration of the issues allied to citizenship. The active teaching practices afforded pupils an opportunity to further cement their strong self-concept and positive sense of identity which, in turn, may have encouraged an empathy towards the

Protestant identity to evolve (Halstead and McLaughlin 2005). Importantly, the isolation and intolerance which Judge (2001) deems to be a consequence of the faith school did not materialize in this data. Indeed it is particularly significant, in the context of the debates on separate schools rehearsed earlier, that the Catholic students' positive views of the 'other' had emerged in the *absence* of long-term inter-group contact. Whilst it could be argued that sustained contact with the Protestant community would have enhanced the students' capacity for mutual understanding, perhaps the citizenship teacher's emphasis on developing student's critical capacities was just as important in encouraging the students to develop the reflexive thinking that Feinberg (2014, p. 499) argues is '...the glue that will serve to cohere religiously pluralistic democracies'.

Conclusion

Whilst there is much speculation about the role of faith schools in hindering relations between groups in plural and conflict societies there has been surprisingly little empirical research in the field (Grace 2003; Parker-Jenkins 2014). Drawing on qualitative data from the principals, citizenship teachers and pupils in one Catholic and one Protestant non-selective, post primary school in Northern Ireland, this paper sought to address this research gap by exploring how teachers taught and pupils understood the issues of identity, group differences and conflict which are embedded within the citizenship curriculum. Despite concerns around the conventional generalisability of qualitative research (i.e., the extent to which the findings from the two schools examined here are similar or different from other schools in their representative school sectors), the paper has highlighted several issues relating to citizenship and the separate school and these are set out below.

Firstly, it lends support to the notion of schools as 'mini polities' (Flanagan et al, 1998). It was argued earlier that Protestant-unionist and Catholic-nationalist identities have

developed in different ways in the post-Agreement period (Mitchell 2003; 2006; Tonge 2015 Garry and McNicholl 2014/15) and the data show that these divergent patterns are also evident within the schools. Hence, the Catholics tended to speak with pride and optimism when discussing their Irish-Catholic identity, whilst for Protestants their sense of identity seemed to be more difficult to describe and was often framed in negative terms.

Secondly, and relatedly, the data have shown that these broader trends with respect to the conceptualisation of their respective identities may position the schools differently when teaching and learning about citizenship. The sense of group esteem evident amongst the Catholic participants appeared to allow them to openly engage with the issues allied to the citizenship curriculum (Halstead and McLaughlin 2005). Teachers embraced the active teaching strategies that are advised by Gamage (2008) DeJaeghere (2009) and Geboers et al, (2013). The students we interviewed were knowledgeable about issues of citizenship, rights and identity, and were supportive of the rights of others to express their views. The challenges in articulating a common narrative of identity in the Protestant school seemed to create a sense of reticence around openly discussing issues related to identity, and active teaching methods were not employed. As a consequence, the pupils had little access to the literature that might allow them to revise stereotypes and misunderstandings of the 'other' within the context of NI.

The paper challenges prevailing assumptions in the literature that separate schools inevitably hinder the teaching of citizenship. Whilst Judge (2001) Veugelers (2011) and Smith (2003) have cautioned against separate schools on the basis that children do not have opportunities to build relations with members of 'other' communities- something they see as critical to fostering tolerance and respect, this paper suggests that separate schools are not *necessarily* constrained when teaching about citizenship. Indeed where schools are confident in a shared sense of purpose and identity this can offer a safe space in which to create the conditions for

actively deliberating around issues allied to the citizenship curricula. The limits of this qualitative research however suggest the need for further exploration of these issues; research which seeks to explore the 'lived experience' of citizenship teachers and students across a range of school types in different jurisdictions will help us better understand the way that separate schools contribute to social cohesion and citizenship.

Finally, the paper highlights the need for statutory teacher-training opportunities. The differential experiences reported across both schools epitomize the demands placed upon citizenship teachers and the challenges that citizenship education presents, particularly in a divided society. That neither of the teachers reported having been specifically trained to teach citizenship is not unusual as no in-service training programme has existed since 2007 (Arlow, 2012). Yet preparation and support seems critical particularly for a subject that is mired in complexity and infused with controversy. A statutory programme of training has the potential to instil a professional confidence that will encourage teachers, regardless of their identity or the school in which they are located, to employ the critical pedagogies that can prepare pupils to live within a pluralist society.

Notes

1. Integrated schools in Northern Ireland educate children from different religious backgrounds together by aiming for an enrolment which is 40% Catholic, 40% Protestant, and 20% children from other religions or no religious background (see NICIE 2012, "Statement of Principles" <http://www.nicie.org/about-us/nicie/statement-of-principles/>).

3. Parades or marches are an important part of the culture of Northern Ireland. The majority of parades are held ostensibly by the Protestant, unionist or Ulster loyalist groups, however Catholic, nationalist and republican groups also parade. Because parading is considered to be an assertion of a group's control over a particular territory or neighbourhood it has traditionally been highly controversial. However in recent years the majority of parades have not inspired violence.

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